

INSIDE THE CANNY VALLEY: RECOGNITION AND THE EXISTENTIAL MODALITY OF BEING HUMAN

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Abstract

Through Hegelian philosophy, recognition has played a long-standing role in phenomenological and existential theories of human selfhood, subsequently being interpreted through the perspectives of sociology and politics. However, it is infrequently approached through the work of Heidegger or Sartre. In this paper, I seek to remedy this lacuna, demonstrating how the concept of recognition holds a central position in both Heideggerian phenomenology and Sartrean existentialism. Moreover, once this lacuna has been filled, an account of human nature emerges whereby the ontology of ‘being human’ is subject to a reciprocal process of intersubjective self-organisation. The intriguing consequence of this account is that the possibility of anthropoid artificial intelligence (AI) is left facing a near-insurmountable ontological challenge.

Keywords: Recognition, Phenomenology, Existentialism, Artificial Intelligence.

1. Introduction

Recognition has played a long-standing role in phenomenological and existential theories of human selfhood, subsequently being interpreted through the perspectives of sociology and politics. In some cases, it is accorded prominence as a vital condition of being human. For example, Taylor (1992, pp. 30-31, 65) describes recognition as playing a central role in one’s sense of belonging and Honneth (1992, 2002) gives a psychological account of the need for recognition to become ‘socially visible’ and to build concepts of self-worth. In a deeper sense, Ikäheimo (2009) contends that recognition is “constitutive of the lifeworld of persons” (p. 36) in virtue of engendering collectively mediated norms that constrain individual dispositions and behaviours.

Nonetheless, the concept of recognition is often used ambiguously (see Iser 2019) and it is sometimes mistreated as an individual’s explicit dis-

position towards others (see Bernstein 2010, Quante 2004 and Wildt 2010 for relevant discussions), rather than as a fundamental condition of being human. Accordingly, an initial objective of this paper is to disambiguate the notion of recognition, elucidating it throughout section 2 as an *existential* of being human (that is, as a fundamental quality without which ‘humanness’ fails to emerge).¹ This objective is achieved by drawing on insights from two stalwarts of phenomenology and existentialism; namely, Heidegger and Sartre. To leverage Heideggerian and Sartrean concepts in support of recognition is in itself unusual and therefore of philosophical value; however, the primary motive for taking such an approach is that it uncovers two ‘constraints’ on human nature, each of which illustrates that to be ‘human’ is dependent on the communal generation and maintenance of intersubjective norms. The first of these constraints is *relational* in that the ontology of ‘human’ is bound within an interconnected network of social meaning – a claim that is borne out through the Heideggerian concept of ‘involvement structures’ – whilst the second constraint is *transcendental* in that the Sartrean notion of self-projection is regulated by the social world of future possibilities. Recognition, which is generally taken to be a resolutely Hegelian idea, is thus substantiated via an articulation of Heideggerian and Sartrean concepts, supporting the paper’s argument that humanness resides within an ontological domain – a ‘canny valley’ – of social normativity. In section 3, it will become apparent that foundational social normativity of the kind proposed accedes to an anthropic bias and, consequently, theorisation of recognition as a modality of being human amounts to a near-insurmountable obstacle for ‘strong AI’.

2. Recognition via Heidegger and Sartre

Before elucidating the claim that recognition is a fundamental part of the modality of being human, it is important to understand exactly what is at stake. Firstly, ‘recognition’ as a core constitutive aspect of existence is an inescapable feature of human life: it is the mutual adherence of one conscious subject to the presence of others, whereby one’s own self-consciousness comes to fuller fruition (Hegel 1975, 1977; Ikäheimo 2007). Importantly, it is not ‘identification’, in the sense that any given thing

1 As will become clear in section 2, this claim persists even if one contends that recognition is a naturalistic process that extends to *all* (not just human) consciousness (see Ruggiu 2016 and Testa 2016).

can be ‘identified’ in numeric, qualitative or general terms, nor is it ‘acknowledgement’, in that this term is typically reserved for consideration of norms, values or principles (Ikäheimo and Laitinen 2007). Lastly, recognition is not necessarily an explicit form of ‘affirmation’, in the sense of analytically declaring X to be X . Instead, recognition is “the unity of opposite self-consciousnesses” (Hegel 1975, p. 177): a structural process of realising one’s own subjective autonomy through the reciprocal challenge of, and by, others’ autonomy.

For Hegel, who is often considered the initiator of phenomenology, recognition is the mechanism by which self-consciousness is generated; one assumes consciousness of oneself only through recognising another self-consciousness and being recognised by it (Hegel 1977, p. 139). In this way, recognition engenders the notion that subjectivity and intersubjectivity are concomitant, with every individual self-recognition relying on others (Ferro 2013).² Picking up this mantle, Heidegger (1976) argues that, as beings which are always already thrown into a world of meaning, every human is, equiprimordially and by ontological necessity, *being-with* (*Mit-*

2 For some (e.g. Ferrarin 2016 and Testa 2009), it is not necessarily the case that actualization of self-consciousness coincides with the emergence of intersubjectivity. Ferrarin (2016), for instance, suggests that ‘recognition’ exclusively applies to the reciprocal encounter of self-consciousnesses, whereas there exists a more fundamental sense of consciousness that captures intersubjective referentiality of the world without recourse to direct recognition. Aside from Hegelian analysis, there is also a strong contemporary movement in favour of the idea that there is a primordial form of pre-reflective self-consciousness that is distinct from any socially emergent self-consciousness (e.g. Zahavi 2014). However, Hegel’s own words tend to proffer recognition as fundamental to self-consciousness: “Self-consciousness is *in* and *for itself in* virtue of the fact that it is in and for itself for an other, that is, it is only as recognized” (Hegel 1807/1997, p. 68). Thus, to accept recognition at face value, at least in Hegelian terms, is to follow the “standard reading” that self-consciousness is generated in a social context (Zahavi 2014, p. 10). Moreover, once recognition is considered in a broader phenomenological-existential context, as is the approach taken in this paper, then it can be aligned with the very intersubjective space of referentiality that Ferrarin separates it from. As we will see, employment of Heideggerian social concepts results in recognition constituting the social ontology of reference and meaning through which self-consciousness manifests.

Lastly, it is important to reiterate that the consideration in this paper is *human* existence. Therefore, even if one were to endorse the view that there is a primordial pre-reflective self-consciousness that is independent of sociality, such a self-consciousness would be common to all sentient beings and, when considered alone, would be divorced from the lived reality of humanity, for which sociality is necessary.

sein) others and *being-among* (*Sein bei*) worldly entities.³ Focussing less on direct engagement with others, Heidegger's notion of being-with others captures the manner in which all worldly entities are referential of others' existence; that is, one encounters the world in pragmatic terms – as a place to act – and as one finds entities as affording certain possibilities for action, one is simultaneously aware that these same entities could be engaged by others in a similar way. This is not to say that others are “somehow added on in thought” (Heidegger 1962, p. 154), but that the world itself is ‘of others’ and ‘for others’ as it is for oneself. All action and thought is historically-culturally conditioned by this worldly permeation of others (Wheeler 2011). Importantly, then, being-with others in this fundamental sense extends subjective consciousness in an otherwise inaccessible manner. The notion that recognising another is some form of activity that needs explanation is eradicated in that the explanandum is presupposed in such a way that it can never be proven but only ‘disclosed’ through an ontological-phenomenological analysis (*ibid.*; Binswanger 1963). For Heidegger (as we will see in more detail shortly), there is simply no form of phenomenological experience that does not depend on the structure of *being-with* others: every event confronts relations of, and to, others. Yet again, this is not a relation that one cognitively achieves or develops into; rather, it is part of the ontological structure through which human being is phenomenologically intelligible. Although Heidegger rarely refers to ‘recognition’, his works thus encapsulate the Hegelian sense of confronting and exposing, in a man-

3 One may feel that it is important to note that Heidegger's *Mistein* is an existential structure of the ontology of being human (or, more accurately, of being *Dasein*): it is an ever-present, intersubjective feature of being that manifests in all aspects of practical life through reference to social meaning. By contrast, Hegelian recognition is often expounded as involving a conflict or struggle, ostensibly typified by the master-slave dialectic. If such interpretations are taken at face value, there is potential conflict between recognition as a reciprocated (and reciprocating) foundation of existence and recognition as a process of struggle for actualization of one's consciousness. However, there are two responses to this. Firstly, in keeping with the previous footnote, recognition within this paper is being treated in a broad phenomenological-existential context, rather than party to Hegelian exegesis, and, consequently, it incorporates the holistic ‘otherliness’ of the world, even in the absence of directly present others. That is, one can still ‘recognise’ in the mode of conscious acquiescence to the existence of others, thereby allowing one's self-consciousness to come to fuller fruition, in the absence of directly present others. Secondly, the idea that human ontology is relationally constrained by the communal generation and maintenance of social norms is something that holds true whether such norms are produced through conflict of ‘unequal’ self-consciousness or a more genial experience of con-sentience.

ner that is reciprocated, the consciousnesses of others so as to corroborate one's own consciousness. As it occurs in an ontological register, this is not something that can be broken down into numeric 'acts of recognition'. Recognition is a fundamental structural feature of consciousness that pervades all experience – it occurs as an ontological necessity of humanness.

This does not mean, however, that one cannot recognise others in different ways. For instance, recognition may encompass various socio-political traits such as gender, class and ethnicity, as well as the possibility of recognising, to varying degrees, others' emotions, intentions and dispositions. However, such detailed and potentially cognitively demanding forms of appreciating others are always founded on the more fundamental recognition that is defined as a structural feature of consciousness.

The development that can be brought forth, here, is that this fundamental form of recognition can be construed as an *existential modality* of being human. By 'modality', I am not referring to a mere 'way of being' or 'form of life' within the domain of possible human existences. There is obviously, for instance, a modality to human existence in the sense that there is *something it is like to be human*, which fundamentally differs from *what it is like to be a bat*. More than being a characteristic of existence, the claim is that recognition encapsulates the very ontology of human existence. In other words, it is only as recognising and recognised beings that we can said to be 'human'. To lack this ability is to fall short of the qualities of consciousness that seemingly distinguish humans from other beings.⁴ As an inherently *mutual* process, the interesting consequence of this claim is that humanness is defined intersubjectively; that is, the reciprocal nature of recognition imports intersubjective conditions on the very nature of being human. Another way of putting this is that recognition is not a *subjective* feature of consciousness (as per facticity and transcendence, of which there will be more below); rather, it emerges in the relations between subjects and their environments. As human 'environments' always involve other humans, the modality of being (a recognising and recognised) human is in fact a personal manifestation of the relational modality of (mutually recognising and recognised) humanity. As consciousness develops phylogeneti-

4 This is, admittedly, a somewhat contentious claim, in that it results in a self-enclosed quality to 'being human' (as we will see in section 3). However, the arguments of this paper do not rely on the premise of proving that the ontology of humans manifests in recognition; rather, the requirement is that if one accepts recognition as definitive of humanness, which amounts to the relatively straightforward claim that self-consciousness defines humanness, then the subsequent premises and conclusion logically follow.

cally and ontogenetically, individual persons can be construed as nodes of intentionality, defined by their place within a network of modal relations, which is prior to and makes possible the very persons that are in question (Searle 2010).

Drawing on this elucidation of recognition as the intersubjective structure of humanness, a kind of *relational constraint* on what it means to be human is derived. By referring to the works of Heidegger, one can understand this claim in a phenomenological-ontological register. In simple Heideggerian terms, the idea is that the ‘world’ from which *Dasein*⁵ manifests is limited by the overriding structural scope of humanness. Recall, for instance, that, for Heidegger, one of the key existential structures of human nature (perhaps the most explanatorily prominent), alongside *being-with others*, is the notion of *being-in-the-world*. More than referring to a simple spatial relationship, this notion of ‘in-the-world’ evokes a sense of dwelling in and with worldly entities in a meaningful way. In further detail, the sense of ‘in’-ness can be elucidated through the concept of ‘involvements’,⁶ which are the defining holistic contexts of everyday practicality. Indeed, involvements create a “relational ontology” from which no worldly entity is ever simply *an* entity but is, instead, bound up in a large-scale network of iterative relational meaning (Wheeler 2011). As Wheeler (2005) explains, one may work *with* a laptop (a relation that Heidegger calls a “with-which”), *in* a university office (an “in-which”), *in order to* produce an academic paper (an “in-order-to”), which is targeted *toward* a specific philosophical analysis (a “towards-this”), *for the sake of* academic research, which is *for the*

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- 5 *Dasein* (‘there-being’) is Heidegger’s appellation for (human) existence, which is “distinctly different from other beings” (1962, 10) in virtue of caring for its surrounding world and, through this, harbouring “concern [...] in its being about its being” (*ibid.*, p. 42). In other words, *Dasein* “includes inquiry in its possibilities of being” (*ibid.*, 7). For Heidegger (1962), *Dasein* is to be distinguished from subjectivity or selfhood, yet any consideration of *Dasein* carries the “ontic indication” that the “who [of *Dasein*] is answered in terms of the I itself, the “subject”, the “self”.” (p. 112). As far as present needs are concerned, it is sufficient that the concept of *Dasein* is one of a world-immersed being (or ‘being-in-the-world’), for whom any form of subjectivity or (self-conscious) self-experience is experience of world-immersed being. As such, references to ‘Heideggerian self-consciousness and/or subjectivity’, with respect to recognition, can be aligned with *Dasein* as far as the argumentative premises of this paper require.
- 6 Heidegger’s original wording is *Bewandtnis*, which Tugendhat (1967) highlights as extremely difficult to translate in a manner that appreciates its nuances. However, the following description of ‘involvement structures’ is in keeping with that of prominent Heideggerian analysts who work from translations (e.g. Brandom 1983, Haugeland 2010 and Wheeler 2011).

sake of being a professional academic (a “for-the-sake-of-which”) (147). Crucially, the referential links across involvements culminate, without exception, in a *for-the-sake-of-which* (Heidegger 1962). Although Heidegger does not state it explicitly, these ‘for-the-sake-of-which’ connections are inevitably social, such that one acts ‘for-the-sake-of-being-a-parent’, or ‘-a-partner’, or ‘-a-professional’, or ‘-a-leader’, or ‘-an-antagonist’, or ‘-a-waiter’, and so on. This brings to light two key insights: (i). firstly, every act, no matter how seemingly iconoclastic, occurs within a totality of involvements that is socially constrained; (ii). secondly, any engagement with another, during which recognition is manifest, elaborates the normative domain of humanness.

Each of the above insights requires a little further development. With respect to (i), consider an experienced teacher at work. Whilst working, the teacher projects herself into the act of teaching and, in so doing, will “interpret herself in definite ways” which are identified by “certain normatively constrained, public ways of behaving” (Wheeler 2005, p. 122). As she expertly acts in the domain-specific manner of a teacher, her skilled and unreflective behaviour is subsumed into the situated social normativity of ‘involvements’ that is appropriate *for the sake of being* a certain way. She will go about her work with an attitude and practices that are generally expected of teachers. In this way, she is behaving in accordance with socially normative constraints (manifest as what is socially expected of a teacher), whilst also realising a system of involvement-structures which confronts the relation of acting *for-the-sake-of-being-a-teacher*. If one takes this idea and extrapolates it to all other situations (not just that of being a teacher), then one finds that the normative roots of the *for-sake-of-which* relation are not individualistically manifest – if they were, there would be no consensus regarding typical behaviours across and within societies – but are socially generated and maintained through ongoing interactions. How one acts *for-the-sake-of-being-a-parent* or *for-the-sake-of-being-a-partner* is normatively regulated by a collective aggregation of what makes a good parent or good partner. Even if one tries to act in a nonconformist manner, such nonconformism is only intelligible against the backdrop of communal normative expectations. In the most basic existential sense conceivable, relating to the world *for-the-sake-of-being-a-human* is itself a social relation, as individual humanness (normatively speaking) only makes sense from within the world of humanity (there will be more on this in section 3). As such, the very *being* of humanness is, to a meaningful extent, socially constrained by the collective mediation of others, which, at its most foundational, emerges with recognition.

With respect to (ii), consider that in everyday engagement with the world, one's experience of actions is, simultaneously, an experience of oneself as a "bodily power" for such an action, in that this specific variety of action accords with schematic potentialities of one's cognitive-motor repertoire (Gallese and Sinigaglia 2011, p. 127). Extending this to social encounters, one's recognition of another is, simultaneously, an experience of one's 'power' to recognise and, reciprocally, one's being recognised is an experience of one's recognisability. In this way, recognition fuels the expansion of one's consciousness, being driven through iterative cycles of self-other recognising and being recognised. Importantly, however, such recognition cycles are not 'bare' occurrences; that is, one frequently recognises another and is recognised oneself as *being a certain way* – a certain gender, age, ethnicity, class and physical stature, amongst other things. This holds true even if recognition is not present through a direct social encounter, but indirectly through engagement with worldly entities that are laden with social meaning (as per Heidegger's account of *Being-with others*). The extent to which any process of recognition entails any of the aforementioned traits will vary from circumstance to circumstance, but, with adult humans, there is always going to be some form of socio-normative trait that is incorporated. It is for this reason that the phenomenological concept of recognition harbours such important socio-political value (Althusser 1970; Fanon 1952; Taylor 1992). This does not mean that recognition is posited as a reflective or deliberative process; it remains a pre-reflective fundament of being human, but one wherein implicit predilections are often inevitably manifest. For present purposes, the significance is that recognition of (an) other(s) will, in general, further consolidate norms of humanness. If, for instance, there are specific norms associated with gender, as is typically the case in human societies, then recognising another as gendered (or being recognised oneself as gendered), will, generally, reinforce prevailing gendering norms. Similarly, if one recognises (or is recognised) as belonging to a certain ethnic group, then this process will normally reinforce norms that surround this ethnic group. Of course, social progress often comes about as a result of such norms being challenged (Haslanger 2019); however, in normal circumstances, norms are implicitly 'built-in' to mutual recognition, so that the socio-cultural norms that pervade all aspects of humanity, from small groups through to 'global culture', are inherently brought forth in each and every recognition.

What emerges, then, is that in virtue of the reciprocation that is at its heart, recognition moves beyond a 'pure' state of mutual generation of one another's (self-)consciousness to create an expanded sense of acquiescence

to norms. This is because the mutual recognition of (an)other(s) is recognition of a specific form of consciousness – a way of being conscious in and of a specific world – and, accordingly, self-recognition of the same sort.

Interestingly, one finds a complementary stance through the lens of Sartrean existentialism, for which responding to the question ‘what is it to be human?’ is motivation for the question itself; that is, the lack of some universal essence cultivates the open-endedness of what it means to be human (Sartre 1956). For existentialists, humans share the universal *condition* of being human, and how one exercises freedom determines who they are. Importantly, however, this freedom is not absolute. People will always be constrained and cajoled by their physical and social environments (i.e. facticity). *Ambiguity* is therefore at the heart of being human, both in terms of consciousness, wherefore each human “asserts himself as a pure internality...[but] also experiences himself as a thing crushed by the dark weight of other things” (de Beauvoir 2015, p. 5), and in terms of temporality, for which “between the past which no longer is and the future which is not yet, this moment when [...] each person] exists is nothing” (*ibid.*, p. 6). In short, one leverages one’s factic background in the process of projecting oneself into domains of purposiveness, yet facticity is never escaped and self-projection is endless. This brings the concept of *transcendence* into play: “Man is all the time outside of himself: it is in projecting and losing himself beyond himself that he makes man to exist; and, on the other hand, it is by pursuing transcendent aims that he himself is able to exist” (Sartre 1956, p. 223). In other words, one’s projection can never attain that at which it aims (hence the ambiguity of existence). Yet, for Sartre, it is only by “always [...] seeking, beyond himself, an aim which is one of liberation or of some particular realisation, that man can realize himself as truly human” (*ibid.*, p. 224). Taken at face value, self-projecting in this manner has a strongly individualistic tone and existentialism is occasionally treated as endorsing this view (e.g. Tan 2006). However, this is a misreading of existentialism as Sartre intended it. Although each person is “radically free” and responsible for choosing the nature of her own existence, there is, in this very act of choosing, a universal application: “When we say that man chooses himself, we do mean that every one of us must choose himself; but by that we also mean that in choosing for himself he chooses for all men” (Sartre 1956, p. 213). Every seemingly individual choice is, then, an expression of the freedom that is definitional of human existence. Connecting this idea to the concept of transcendence and the limitations of one’s factic background, Sartre contends that “every human purpose presents itself either as an attempt to surpass these limitations, or to widen

them, or else to accommodate oneself to them. Consequently, every purpose [...] is of universal value" (*ibid.*, p. 210). Thus, for Sartre, every act that any individual performs contributes to the possibilities of what one can perform *as a human*: each act, no matter how minute, is part of the process of fashioning one's own existence and, crucially, this individual fashioning is simultaneously a fashioning of the human scope of action possibilities.

To contribute to the fashioning of humanity in the very process of fashioning one's own existence brings to light another constraint on what it means to be human – a *transcendental constraint*. Consider, again, that one seeks to transcend one's facticity through the pervasive process of self-projection. Initially, this may seem to suggest that one may exercise one's freedom howsoever one wishes in accordance with one's facticity, but 'howsoever one wishes' is perhaps not as radical as it may seem. As party to specific histories and cultures, each human's capacity to consciously – pre-reflectively and reflectively – self-project is itself factually influenced, such that the scope of actions and accompanying thoughts is far from open-ended. For example, a being who is biologically 'human' but is completely feral – mute, violent, amoral, asocial, living in wilderness without any cultural influence or paraphernalia – would, arguably, be treated as non-human due to lacking any of the factic undertones that are part of the universal condition of humanity. At the very least, such a being would be at the very horizontal edge of humanness even if they were capable partaking in the mutuality of recognition. In a similar vein, but taken from a different perspective, a 'human' who could naturally run one-hundred metres in five seconds would exceed the transcendental scope of others' self-projective possibilities. This being would, once again, be at the bounds of ontological humanness, if they were to be considered 'human' at all. Lastly, think of a biological human who were capable of genuine telepathy: would they be considered 'human'? In each of these three cases, the beings in question inhabit a realm of existence that is beyond the normative domain of possibilities that is mutually fashioned by all humans. Each of their factic-transcendent situations is too radical and too removed from the global scope of humanness at this time to be readily accepted (or categorised) as genuinely 'human'.

A swift meander through the key facets of Heideggerian phenomenological ontology and Sartrean existentialism thus brings to evidence some vital insights into the ontological nature of humanness. What emerges is that 'being human' fundamentally entails a social dimension through the process of recognition and, once this claim is granted, one finds that the modality of 'humanness' is subject to mutual restraints of *relational* and

transcendental forms. The former of these amounts to in-the-moment pre-reflective structuring of cognition and action through communal norms that pervade existence, whilst the latter regulates one's self-projection regarding future possibilities.

3. AI's 'Last Dream' and Anthropic Bias

The premises of the previous section's arguments are core aspects of mainstream phenomenological ontology and existentialism; however, such claims are rarely developed in the manner demonstrated so as to have applicability to contemporary discussions in the field of artificial intelligence (AI). One of the most pressing issues for AI is, arguably, the potential to achieve 'strong AI' – AI that is, to all extents and purposes, 'human-like'. If such AI were to be achieved, then, one could reasonably suppose, it would be objectively alike to any given human. This is even more likely if strong AI were to be realised through material media that amounted to physical replication of the biological human body, resulting in a comprehensive achievement of Weizenbaum's (1980) 'last dream' for artificial intelligence. In short, if anthropoid robots were developed that had human-like appearance, intelligence and abilities in all aspects of existence, then one would expect such beings to be assimilated into everyday human life, living indistinguishably from others.

However, the preceding detour through phenomenological ontology and existentialism leaves one facing the fact this would not in fact be the case. Before addressing such a claim, it is important to swiftly distinguish it from the standard phenomenological critique of AI. This critique stems from the fact that, traditionally, AI – and, indeed, wider cognitive science – endorses the view that the mind is best replicated when treated as an individualistic, de-contextualised and cognitively isolated entity; that is, the discipline of AI leverages the metaphor of the mind as a computer and uses this as guidance for theoretical and practical developments – a view that is variously referred to as 'Cartesian cognitive science' (Wheeler 2005) or 'good old-fashioned AI' (Haugeland 1985). The orthodoxy is thus that cognition is an independent ontological domain that requires the computational manipulation of representational states. As such, the field of AI, for many years, has sought to retain the explanatory independence of the internal (i.e. neural) mind.

Drawing inspiration from phenomenology, Dreyfus (1991, 2007) criticises this view as ignoring the fundamentally enworlded, context-sensitive

and constitutively social dimensions of human existence – dimensions that would require replication if one is to treat human cognition as archetypical of ‘mind’. The idea of mind as a kind of central processing unit that sequentially receives inputs, computationally processes them and delivers causally formalised outputs is then replaced with the idea of mind as a dynamic phenomenon that depends non-trivially – sometimes constitutively – on its surrounding world (including the body and an environmental niche). This has occasionally been described (see Wheeler and Kiverstein 2012) as moving away from a kind of ‘Cartesian cognitive science’ towards a ‘Heideggerian cognitive science’, for which the notion of ‘being-in-the-world’ has central importance and, therefore, there is pursuit of a more satisfactory alignment between cognition and subjects’ existential nature as living bodily beings who are embedded in specific socio-cultural worlds.

Contrary to this, the criticism at the heart of this paper is that even if AI is to be fully ‘Heideggerian’, in the sense of achieving cognitive and behavioural abilities that are indistinguishable from human cognition and behaviour, it would still not be readily incorporated into the modality of human existence. The reason for this refers back to the concept of *recognition*. Recall that at its most fundamental, there is an implicit process of assuming consciousness of oneself through recognising another and being recognised (Hegel 1977). However, this process grows through the natural course of human phenomenology such that recognition of others imports more than a bare recognition of consciousness; it may include, for instance, recognition of another’s gender, ethnicity, or social class. What’s more, as recognition underpins the intersubjectivity within the manifestation of human existence, it is responsible for giving rise to the *relational* and *transcendental* constraints that were discussed in the previous section. Consequently, to recognise others and be recognised oneself leaves one existentially committed to the universal conditioning and communal normativity of humanity, which is to say that assuming consciousness through recognition renders one bound by the (global) social domain of all humans interacting with one another.

Whilst the mutuality of recognition is clearly understood as emerging between individuals, the above highlights that there is also mutuality amongst every given human being and humanity as a whole. What I mean by this is that each individual (cognitively and behaviourally) enacts the communally generated domain of norms that encapsulate ‘humanness’ and, in so doing, each individual contributes to the ongoing creation and maintenance of these norms. This means that there is reciprocal feedback between intersubjective normative generation and the canalisation of subjectivity. It

is due to this reciprocity that ‘being human’ is best captured *modally*; that is, the definition of ‘human’ assumes an operationally closed organisation whereby subjective and intersubjective interactions generate and maintain the existential domain of ‘humanness’ (cf. De Jaegher and Di Paolo 2007 on dyadic interactions). Crucially, this is an organic process: recognition amongst consciousnesses begins a series of dynamic encounters (‘re-cognitions’) across humanity that escalates to a normative background of communally accepted dispositions, abilities and overt behaviours, which are all naturally underpinned by cognition. It is the organic nature of this process – the fact that it emerges phylogenetically and ontogenetically – that produces a problem for AI. Quite simply, the recognition mutuality that arises amongst humans would not necessarily manifest in an implicit manner between humans and AI: the very fact of knowing that AI is not biologically human would result in a reflective questioning of the abilities and behaviours of AI. Humans accept the relational and transcendental constraints of others due to the implicitness of mutual recognition, but once one has any reason to reflect on this implicit process – and artificialness is such a reason – then subjective acquiescence to intersubjective normativity is no longer guaranteed. In many ways, this is simply an accentuated version of the prejudices that one finds in racism, sexism or xenophobia, in that recognising the humanity of ‘others’ is questioned in such a way that one’s own existence is normatively divorced from the expectations one has of these others.

There is thus an aporia at the heart of the idea that the modality of ‘humanness’ is formed and maintained by restraints harboured within the ontological process of recognition. Whilst, in theory, recognition is part of the radical freedom and openness that are central to both existentialism and phenomenology, the fact that it relies on mutual circularity of subjective and intersubjective normative regulation means it nonetheless entails a systemically closed nature. In other words, ‘human’ and ‘humanity’, together, categorise one another and, crucially, do so at the expense of other beings, even if those beings demonstrate traits that are ostensibly indistinguishable from those of extant ‘humans’. In this way, being human is part of humanness and vice-versa; there is a self-organised closure to the normative ontological domain that is generated and maintained through the interactive dynamics that have recognition at their core.⁷

7 *Autopoiesis*, which is the biologically grounded recursive reproduction of a system’s structure and processes through its own elements, may be thought of as an adequate description of this self-organisation (cf. Thompson 2007; Varela et al. 1991). By using such a description, the ontological elucidation of ‘being human’

There is an interesting contrast, here, with one of the prominent concerns with the development of ‘Big Data’ machine learning algorithms. Such machines are programmed to automatically analyse massive, digitally produced datasets that are used to measure, diagnose and research human social life (Kitchin 2014). A pressing problem is that as such data is increasingly used in the management of human institutions and interactions, one must consider how such machine learning algorithms reflect humans’ “entrenched assumptions about agency, transparency, and normativity”. (Gill 2019, p. 166). The programmed automaticity and fine-scaled inscrutability of such massive data manipulation renders the assimilation into daily life of these algorithms as potentially troublesome, having a “serious impact on how domains of knowledge and expertise are produced, and how such domains of knowledge become internalized, affecting institutional governance” (p. 167). The problem boils down to the lack of transparency and openness of such large-scale algorithmic processing; consequently, implicit biases and polemical views from arenas of public discourse may be compounded and extrapolated by the inclusion of ‘big data’ within everyday human practices. In short, then, ‘big data’ AI may take some of the worst aspects of humanity and feed it back in an aggravated manner without our awareness.

Yet, by contrast, the suggestion made above is that humanity may end up rejecting anthropoid AI even if they reflect our ‘entrenched assumptions’ in a perfect manner. That is, regardless of how accurately anthropoid AI mirrors our own nature, there will be distrust of even the slightest divergence from communal norms purely on the basis of the AI’s nature entailing ‘artificialness’. Small differences – be it failures, achievements, opinions, appearances, abilities – will, potentially, be dismissed as a product of artificial creation rather than according with the standard variance that one finds within ‘natural’ humanity. Worse than this, if anthropoid AI were to begin questioning harmful human implicit biases and norms, then there is the possibility that ‘entrenched’ attitudes would prevent acceptance, or even reasoned consideration, of such questioning on the basis that AI – in spite of anthropoid appearance, behaviour and thought processes – would somehow still be separate from the communal normative shaping of ‘humanness’.

Ultimately, there is an inescapable anthropic bias that is fundamental to the recognition that ontologically encapsulates being human. This bias

that is outlined in this paper can be modernised, finding affinity with the paradigm of biological enactivism (*ibid.*).

emerges naturally as a consequence of the organic process of recognition and, consequently, anything ‘artificial’ – no matter how indistinguishable from human activity – will potentially be ostracised from the normative domain of humanity on the pure basis of awareness of its artificialness.

4. *Conclusion*

Many interpretations of phenomenology and existentialism have leveraged the concept of recognition as central to theorisation of human nature. In this paper, this claim has been substantiated through the less commonly followed avenues of Heideggerian phenomenological ontology and Sartrean existentialism. Importantly, what emerges from such an approach is that ‘being human’ is ontologically constrained by the communal generation and maintenance of intersubjective norms. Ostensibly, this is philosophically unproblematic. However, once one extends such thinking to consider anthropoid AI, one finds a latent anthropic bias that is underlain by human phylogeny and ontology, and, therefore, discriminates against artificialness.

Consequently, to be ‘human’ is to partake in a self-enclosed domain – a ‘canny valley’ of organic sameness and familiarity – from which AI is, by definition, excluded. Of course, in the same way that humanness has phylogenetically transformed across history, there is strong likelihood that bias against artificiality will eventually subside, but, for now, humans are resolutely flesh and blood.

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